

Presentation note

Knowledge, Policy-Making and Public Action in Education

LUÍS MIGUEL CARVALHO

As with earlier editions of *Sísifo*, it is the aim of this dossier to display a set of original pieces of work to the readers of the magazine, which are works belonging to a specific research field and which are supervised and produced in the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Lisbon (FPCE-UL). The main aim, here, is to focus on a particular area of studies in Educational Administration, more precisely, the sphere of work given over to the analysis of educational policies.

This dossier, a product of knowledge regarding itself as provisional and unfinished, is, above all, a starting point. Picking up on the terms of the introductory texts in *Sísifo*, it is the beginning of a *knowledge adventure*, a journey pushed forward by the desire to know and learn more about state educational policies. Effectively, it is the aim of the articles, in this dossier, to illustrate how the issue of knowledge mobilisation in policy-making and public action is being tackled by two fields in which such studies are being developed at our Faculty: within the scope of a European research project on relations between knowledge and politics in the sectors of education and health (*KNOW&POL*); in research projects stemming from the first advanced training course of the PhD program in Educational Sciences.

The first part of the dossier includes writings by professors in the specialised Educational Administration area of the FPCE-UL (João Barroso, Luís Miguel Carvalho, Madalena Fontoura and Natércio Afonso) and has two main aims. The first is to highlight purposes and ways of articulating post-gradu-

ate training and research in the afore-mentioned specialisation area, the second is based on the inclusion of state policy studies within the context of the important evolution that has been given to the direction of these studies since the beginning of the current decade. It goes on to present a brief summary of the research project *KNOW&POL*, by identifying the issue under study, the main theoretical and analytical strands, giving particular emphasis to the presentation of research projects carried out by the Portuguese team, within the framework of their involvement in the program.

The second part of the dossier is composed of 10 texts, written by PhD students who completed the first advanced training course (October 2005/October 2006), and containing condensed versions of their research projects. These works were initially presented in the Seminar “*Conhecimento, decisão política e acção pública em educação*”, [Knowledge, policy making and public action in education], held in the FPCE-UL, on May 3rd 2007, having undergone investigation and debate aroused by the comments of three guest researchers: Ana Maria Seixas, from the University of Coimbra, Fátima Antunes and Fernando Ilídio Ferreira, both from the University of Minho.

As our readers may verify, these ten articles are not only connected by a common theme or by affiliation within a broad area of social theory, designated, by some, as the constructivist galaxy. They are interconnected by a variety of affinities: they share a commitment to the understanding of relations be-

tween knowledge and politics; they are encouraged by the debate regarding the transformations of the role and intervention forms of the State in the governing of education; dialogue is sustained among them by means of a relatively restricted set of conceptual tools (e.g., public action, frame of reference, public action instrument, policy transference, regulation). Despite such common denominators, these works obviously follow their own, different paths; however, it is still possible to place them in four, broad, theme-based groups.

In the first set of projects, which we may refer to as focusing on the study of “public policies on schools”: *José Hipólito Lopes* looks at the study of autonomy as a frame of reference for public action in education; *César Rufino* proposes to understand the diffusion and use of internal school evaluation devices within the context of the creation of a European education space; *Graça Jęgundo Simões* takes a look at the impact of different frames of reference and the self-evaluation instruments of schools on the regulation of local education action.

A second set of works is geared towards the understanding of state policies which aspire to supervise, coordinate and control the action of specific groups: *Estela Costa* sets out to discover the mobilisation of knowledge in the construction of frames of reference and instruments of the teacher evaluation policy; *João Matos Ribeiro* focuses his attention on the analysis of interpretative scheme transformations and rules for the action of the “school head” within the context of local policy regulation.

A third set of projects stem from specific political measures: *Clara Freire Cruz* discusses the creation of Municipal Education Councils based on which, an analysis of the de-centralisation and territorialisa-

tion policies of education and subsequent surrounding organisational processes may be constructed; *Carlos Pires* aims to analyse the policy-making and implementation processes of a number of measures which, as he mentions, have come to be associated with the idea of “Full-Time Schooling”.

It is the desire to become familiar with the intervention of certain collective agents in the social processes forming state policies that brings together the fourth, final set of works. Two of them give attention to parental participation, however, they take very distinct research paths: *João Macedo Faria* sets out to analyse the protagonism of parental associativism on the basis of the tension between its self-referential constitution and the regulation strategies of state policy-makers; *Carla Cibele Figueiredo* tries to find out to what extent the voice of parent organisations is taken into consideration in the creation of “sex education” state policies “within the school environment”, through addressing social and political networks. Finally, *Ana Pina*’s text transports us to another territory and to a different public action agency, the written press and journalistic discourse, with a view to critically questioning relations between such discourse and policy construction.

To close this dossier, an essay by Fátima Antunes, from the University of Minho, has been published on “*The Regulation of State Educational Policies: spaces, dynamics and agents*” (organised by João Barroso), which brings together a collection of works produced within the framework of the European research project (*Reguleducnetwork*), to which the Educational Administration area of the FPCE-UL was connected between 2001 and 2004.

Translated by Tânia Lopes da Silva